

FRANCIS P. GAINES

# Opening the Doors

## Introduction

Since the GI Bill radically changed U.S. higher education, the question arose as to whether (then) AAC was involved in the planning and implementation of the GI Bill that brought service men and women to college and university campuses. The answer is that the Association was deeply involved, if one looks at the guest speakers at AAC's Annual Meeting of January 10 to 12, 1945, held in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

At this meeting, the presidents in attendance heard about postwar planning from such speakers as Archibald MacLeish, poet and assistant secretary of state, who spoke about the democratization of communications after the war. General George C. Marshall, chief of staff of the United States Army, spoke "off the

record" (because he did not want his talk

in the press before he had presented this proposal to Congress) on the topic "Compulsory Military Training." Charles H. Bolte, chairman of the American Veterans Committee, a disabled veteran and alumnus of Dartmouth College Class of 1940, spoke about the impact of the GI Bill on the nation's campuses.

There are several papers taking a variety of angles regarding the returning veterans entering the colleges and schools. AAC members were persuaded of the merits of the GI Bill; they also recognized the personal and educational difficulties involved in veterans' entry into higher education. Although it was delivered on January 15, after the meeting, over the Columbia Broadcasting System, a paper by Francis F. Gaines, president of Washington and Lee University and president of AAC for 1944-45 (Guy Snavely was executive director), was published with the proceedings. It is a succinct statement about veterans' education including liberal education. —EDITOR

FRANCIS P. GAINES was president of Washington and Lee University. This address was first delivered over Columbia Broadcasting System, January 15, 1945. It was printed in the *Bulletin*, Volume 31, No. 1, 1945.

## Opening the Doors of Opportunity:

### Liberal Education in the Veterans' Program

One historic event in this epoch that has recorded much history is an unprecedented compliment paid to education.

Through all the centuries peoples in crisis have turned to education. Twenty-seven centuries ago, to an Israel that was in blackest night of military disaster and economic depression, Isaiah offered as ultimate comfort: "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the waters of affliction, nevertheless shall thy teachers be not removed." In our own crisis of military peril, this nation turned to the schools. In direct service to the maintenance of this war, the whole educational system of America, and particularly the institutions of higher learning, proved a resource comparable with the training facilities of our enemies, though we had certainly not matched them in planning for military efficacy. Our schools trained multitudes of men and women, some in uniform and some in the ranks of specialized production; our schools made available laboratories for varied research; our schools sent from faculty ranks a great group, perhaps the greatest group, of specialists for expert inquiry; our schools developed on the campus an alert and energetic young citizenship, which worked with distinction in its own field and proved influential in stimulating effort among other zones of our society.

The compliment paid education, however, does not rest upon a recognition of this war-time contribution. The tribute to education is in the fact that the government provides for further training of these veterans as security and promise for the days of peace. Never before have so many doors of opportunity been opened to hundreds of thousands of American youth. Never before has a nation so completely vested its hope of a better, as well as a secure, future in the training of its youth.

## For a better world

This program has met with what is practically unanimous accord. The American people feel that the provisions of what we know as the "GI Bill of Rights" are just an attempt at restitution—as far as any restoration is possible—of the

**The colleges regard it as at once a privilege and a duty to serve the veteran**



# of Opportunity

**Liberal Education  
and the Veterans**



University of  
Missouri-Columbia



**Liberal education  
proposes certain  
fundamental skills  
that make all  
subsequent knowledge  
both easier and  
more significant**

bright and important years requisitioned for national defense. Our people feel, moreover, that society needs to recapture the talents, the potential, of all the boys and girls—by now two full academic generations of them—now in uniform. But there is something more in the national accord on this bill. It is more than a compliment to education, more than an endorsement of education, more than a credential that the educators can present to these youths themselves. This bill is a kind of muted petition, an unuttered plea of the heart of a people—“O, take our boys and girls and with them, and for them, build a better world.”

**Adaptations needed**

Translating this legislation into orderly procedure will involve, of course, manifold problems. Most of these difficulties will be included within the academic routines and may not be matters of concern for the general public. There will be, for example, the question of articulation, just where and how the veteran may best pick up again the task of training. There will be endless confusion as to credits that may be

Stephens College



granted upon the college level for various courses pursued under military auspices, even for various types of military experience. There will be the challenge of campus cohesion; for the colleges want to absorb these veterans into the normal processes, particularly those that develop personality, and yet there will certainly be distinctions. Imagine a veteran exchanging an overseas cap for a freshman cap! Upon the average college green of the next few years there

may be three clearly defined groups: the veterans, enjoying government subsidy, with wide experiences behind them; young war workers who interrupted their career for a patriotic service but have not gained the subsidy or the glam-

our or the psychology of this adventure; and the younger boys and girls, the “regulars,” entering fresh from the secondary level, without subsidy or experience, compelled to plan for the same unpredictable world. Educators will be challenged to merge these elements into unity.

There will be one problem, however, perhaps the supreme problem, which will have widest social implications. It will be the concern of everybody interested in the future. Bluntly stated, this problem may be posed as a question: How much of a hurry will the veterans be in, and how much of their haste will be at the expense of liberal or general education?

Undoubtedly many compulsions of speed will operate in their thinking. They will feel strangely old; no cogencies of the elders will ever persuade the 25-year [old] veteran that he is not far, far along the path of life. They will have had tensions and responsibilities and long contemplations and even proximity to tragedy that we know nothing of, and thus they will feel that much of the academic procedure is trivial, a kind of child's play; indeed, these veterans may have a maturity of life beyond that of many of our instructors. The boys and girls from the armed forces will have a sense of momentum lost, and may want to acquire at once a new confidence of job-adequacy and job-security; particularly will they want to be able to get in on the ground floor, as it were, of a strange new world taking shape.

If they are in great haste, moreover, they will be but following a pronounced American tendency. For years we have had a kind of mania for the short cut. In certain realms of life this mania has justified itself; our amazing industrial and scientific progress results in part from our intolerance of the tedious, our dissatisfaction with the established process. The iconoclasm of the frontier has been a factor of power as we have explored many new sectors of promise.

**Reserves of power**

But we must stop occasionally to remind ourselves of a stubborn truth. We may praise the

short cuts of production, even the short cuts of social relationships. There is no short cut to the comprehension of the largeness of truth and there is no short cut to the creation of greatness in personality.

These ends, comprehension of truth and greatness of personality, are the declared purposes of liberal education. To be sure there are phases of this general education that if not exactly practical are reserves of power for practical application. Liberal education proposes certain fundamental skills that make all subsequent knowledge both easier and more significant. The power of analytical reading, the basic command of language, the logic and the imagination involved in managing the mathematical symbols, these capacities may prove fundamental for the acquisition of definite efficiencies.

More importantly, liberal education seeks to make the man at home in the realms of ideas and ideals and thus make him happier and more nobly influential in the total impact of his life. There is a larger and a graver fact here than this hint of consequence to the individual. The destiny of the world, possibly within the generation of these veterans, may be decided in this world of ideas and ideals.

### **Truth and freedom**

I give you twelve words, a little formula of immense portent. They contain more of the essence of democracy and more of a definition of education than any similar statement I know. They are the words of Jesus: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth will make you—" What? Well informed, entertaining, impressive? Possibly so, but this is not what He said. Cultured and graced in appreciation for life's enrichment? Undoubtedly, but this is not what He said. Competent for the mastery of great forces and thus successful in life's ambition? It may be so, but this is not what He said. The assertion he made is: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth will make you free." In that statement is something more than analysis of cause and effect, something more than a permission or even a promise. There is a mandate in those words. If we would be free—free from our doubtings and free from our distortions, free from our fears and free from our furies—if we would be free men in a free world, we must know the truth.

Liberal education intends to lead youth to the sources of truth and to make youth capable of understanding truth.

There is no single source. Ultimately this thing we call truth may prove in each individual life a mosaic of beauty. Truth will be found in some insight into the past, such as a chapter of American history that gave us the Declaration, and truth will be found in some timeless principle enunciated by Plato or by Job, and truth will be found in the apocalyptic vision of Shakespeare's fancy. Truth will be found in the abstraction of Descartes' law and in the disciplines of mastering that *utor* group of verbs that cry out for the ablative. Truth may come enchantingly upon Handel's strains or may penetrate our hearts as we hear the immortal cry of pain from David's heart. Truth may be ugly in a vision of the murk of the city slums and truth may be holy as the illumination of candles burning before an altar. All of it is truth. He who would be free—and he who would be a guardian of freedom—must know it.

Out of such comprehension will come a new recognition of ideals and a new sense of their importance and a new allegiance to them. In the face of threats to these ideals men gladly offer their lives, if need be; but in the common hope that springs from these ideals we have not yet enlisted the same measure of devotion. They are simple things, justice and tolerance and sympathy and the higher liberty. Men everywhere of the democratic persuasion acknowledge their authority. But the procedures of enforcement, the processes of making these ideals effective in the ordinary human relationships and activities, remain one of the supreme difficulties of life.

Liberal education dedicates itself to a solution. This type of education undertakes not only to lead men to the sources of truth but also to train men for the understanding of truth. Liberal education seeks to make men loyal to the great truths that are the only foundations of security, the only authentic guarantees.

The colleges regard it as at once a privilege and a duty to serve the veteran. These colleges want to be more than storehouses of information or apprentice shops for efficiency or even custodians of the ancient idealism. They would provide both the knowledge and the dynamic for empowered persons who will order the circumstances, the hard and the complex circumstances of our age, into a brave new world. □

*To respond to this article, e-mail [liberaled@aacu.org](mailto:liberaled@aacu.org), with author's name on the subject line.*